

In this Spotlight series, Tourettes Action speaks with professionals across the health and education sector about their role in supporting someone with TS

SPOTLIGHT

on... psychiatrist



Q&A with Professor Chris Hollis, Psychiatrist

Tourettes Action interviewed Professor Chris Hollis to find out how a psychiatrist can be of support to someone with Tourette Syndrome.

What is a psychiatrist?

A psychiatrist is a medically qualified doctor who specialises in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions. Some psychiatrists will also specialise in the management of neurodevelopmental and neuropsychiatric conditions, including Tourette Syndrome.

After qualification and two years basic training in general medical and surgical specialities – doctors choosing to become psychiatrists first undergo basic training in all branches of psychiatry. This is followed by a period of further training that enables them to sub-specialise in working with a specific age group or clinical population, for example with children and adolescents, or adults, or people with learning disabilities or the elderly. Most psychiatrists who see people with tics or Tourettes are child and adolescent psychiatrists (seeing children and young people up to age 18) or neuropsychiatrists who specialise in the behavioural and psychiatric aspects of brain disorders.

Can you explain the role of Psychiatry in TS which is a Neurological condition?

As well as being able to assess, diagnose and treat tics, psychiatrists are experienced in assessing and treating many of the common co-existing conditions alongside Tourettes including ADHD, OCD, ASD anxiety and depression. This can be very helpful, as these co-existing conditions are often more impairing than tics themselves. Psychiatrists specialising in the management of Tourettes and other neurodevelopmental conditions are also able to both prescribe medication (if required) and offer behavioural and psychological therapies.

Psychiatrists typically work in multi-disciplinary teams including nurses, clinical psychologists and family therapists. These teams contain professionals with a range of skills which are helpful in supporting people with Tourettes, their families and carers.

In our Tourette's clinic at Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham, I work with a Specialist Nurse, Joe Kilgariff and trainee psychiatrists. Most of the children and young people referred to our service with tics, also have other neurodevelopmental and mental health conditions which we are able to assess and treat with a range of interventions including psychoeducation, behavioural therapy and medication.

Can psychiatrists provide therapeutic support as well as medical?

Yes, most psychiatrists who specialise in the management of people with Tourette's are trained to offer psychoeducation, behavioural and psychological support as well as medication for people with tics/Tourette's. In our Tourette's clinic in Nottingham, our Specialist Nurse, Joe Kilgariff is trained to offer both behavioural therapy and medication. Our trainee psychiatrists working under my supervision, will undertake diagnostic assessments, psychoeducation and prescribe medication when required.

Can psychiatrists refer patients to other services, i.e. behavioural therapy?

If psychiatrists don't have the training themselves, or have a member of their team who can offer behaviour therapy for tics – then they can refer to a specialist service such as our Tourette's Clinic at Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham.

In the UK there are too few practitioners trained in behavioural therapy for tics – therefore, we are looking into ways to make behavioural therapy more accessible, for example with supported online treatment packages. We are currently testing such an approach called ORBIT (Online Remote Behavioural Intervention for Tics) in Nottingham and Great Ormond Street Hospital, London.

Who is more likely to refer a child to a psychiatrist – a GP or paediatrician?

Most children of primary school age with suspected tics will be referred by their GP to either a community paediatrician or a child and adolescent psychiatrist who will undertake a full developmental assessment. For teenagers, and in young people who may have depression and anxiety, a GP may decide to refer first to a psychiatrist.

We run a specialist (tertiary) Tourettes clinic in Nottingham which only takes referrals from paediatricians or child psychiatrists, but not from GPs.

About Professor Chris Hollis

Chris Hollis is a Professor of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and Director, NIHR MindTech MIC, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences at the University of Nottingham.

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